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## Existentially Guilty: Where Do I Go From Here?

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Existentially Guilty: Where Do I Go From Here?

Devontae Wilson

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English  
with a specialization in English Teaching

23 July 2021

Dr. Erin Labbie, First Reader  
Dr. Lee Nickoson, Second Reader

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Devontae Wilson

### Analytical Narrative

In applying to the MA English with a specialization in teaching program, I sought to expand the depth of my knowledge, specifically the teaching of writing to help prepare my students for the rigors of academic writing in college, and my dream is to teach at the collegiate level, or at least be eligible for dual credit, and I believe this program will give me the best opportunity of developing into a great educator. My undergraduate thesis used Ernest Gaines' *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* as a literary lens through which I studied the writer as an activist. The intense political climate witnessed in my hometown of Baton Rouge, La after the murder of Alton Sterling, at the hands of an officer sworn to protect and serve, spurred me to define activism for myself. Despite my reluctance to protest, I questioned, am I an activist in my own right? Alton Sterling's murder brought all of those stories of lynchings, race riots, and state sanctioned murder to prominence in the news media. Personally, it affirmed all of those microaggressions I brushed off as isolated incidents, or I hoped the person was simply misspoke or was ignorant. Growing up in the inner city, I could plainly see the disparity between the affluent, white neighborhoods and the largely poor, black neighborhoods. I watched my parents leave for work early in the morning and come home late to what amounted to seemingly fruitless labor never enough to change our financial status. No one in the community had an answer or seemed to care about truly uplifting marginalized communities written off as undesirable and the residents as pathologically criminal. Critical Race Theory and post-colonial studies were tools to give language to the systemic issues I watched saw daily in impoverished neighborhoods.

Critical Race Theory was a pivotal theoretical framework in the way I interacted with texts, the news media, and interactions with other people. CRT originated in law schools; fundamentally, it is a critique of how race shapes and is shaped by the law. Race shaped the law in terms of legal jurisprudence, legislation, law school pedagogy and enforcement of the law. It is a look at how law racializes every aspect of our lives from constructing rights and privileges. Activism is perceived differently depending on the activists. The tenets of CRT are as follows: 1. Race is socially constructed. Race is not natural or biological. It is not objectively real but it has real consequences. 2. Racism is a normal outcome of US institutions and social relations. Racism is the everyday operation of the US system. 3. Intersectionality. Our identities put us in different social locations. 4. Black/White binary. Race affects different racial groups differently. 5. Racism is permanent because whites are fixated on anti-Blackness. Other racial groups are somewhere in the middle. Race is something whites could give up, but they won't. 6. A commitment to narrative. The law normally excises things it sees as extraneous, which animate our racialized world. Without seeing the contextualization of race, we get injustices.

Dr. Rickard Rebellino introduced the YA lit class to intersectionality as a way to analyze #DiverseTexts in young adult and children's literature. Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal scholar and critical race theorist, coined the term intersectionality in "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," a legal study to help explain the oppression of African American women. Crenshaw explains intersectionality as "a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things" (Kimberle Crenshaw). Through

intersectionality, the Ms. Marvel graphic novel highlights the multiple levels of oppression of Kamala Khan, the real-life identity of Ms. Marvel. Kamala Khan is a Muslim Pakistani-American teenager from New Jersey, and she is the daughter of immigrants. As a woman, Kamala faces gendered oppression in the United States built on a system of patriarchy and misogyny. In a post-9/11 world, Islam has become associated with terrorism and acts of radical extremism. Being seen as the opposite of Christianity where white Jesus absolves whites of the past ills of their subjugation of marginalized groups. The Muslim identity has become a racialized identity akin to Blacks as fundamentally dangerous to the democratic experiment that is America. As a person of color, Kamala would always fall somewhere in the middle of the Black/White binary. Also, Kamala is the first-generation American daughter of Pakistani, immigrant parents. She faces the social pressure to reject her heritage and assimilate to American culture.

The portfolio papers largely reflect the incorporation of CRT as an examination of the secondary English curriculum, the scripting of racist ideologies onto Black and Brown bodies, the impact of white supremacy as a tool in domestic terrorism, and the dehumanization of pedagogical practices that support marginalized communities. The revisions of the portfolio were largely about having more time to reexamine the final papers that told a cohesive story. In revising, I felt the papers could be expanded, and I read to strengthen my knowledge base: *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide* by Carol Anderson, *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul* by Eddie Glaude, *Scripting the Black Masculine Body: Identity, Discourse, and Racial Politics in the Popular Media* by Ronald Jackson, *Hood Feminism: Notes From the Women That a Movement Forgot* by Mikki Kendall, and *Invisible*

*Man* by Ralph Ellison. With that research came the additions to help support and strengthen the arguments presented in each paper and using the suggestions from each professor.

Although CRT is designed as an academic field in legal studies, it can be used to examine systemic injustices in every facet of American life. The selected papers tell a cohesive story throughout my journey in the program mirroring my personal experiences grappling with the realities of anti-Blackness. A goal of mine in writing, selecting, and revising these specific papers for the portfolio is to share through anecdotal evidence and extensive research the need for sweeping changes to the curriculum. There has been the narrative built around specific stories as American because of groups like the Daughters of the Confederacy who continued fighting for the South using discrete methods, i.e., policy, public opinion, and textbooks. The stories pushed to American children has been that of the Confederacy's lost cause myth. Although the South lost the War and their enslaved labor force, it held on to the romanticization of forcing the enslaved to work under the threat of mutilation or death. This allows slavery to be written off as not that bad. White settlers colonizing the West and murdering the indigenous peoples for their land is taught as Manifest Destiny, the belief that God has predestined the expansion of the United States to dominate and spread democracy and capitalism across the North American continent. Their stranglehold on curriculum allows for the indigenous to be discussed in classrooms as if they were all wiped from the face of the Earth. Those left were herded onto reservations, the remnants of the Trail of Tears. The curriculum hides the racialization of Mexican immigrants as undesirables not welcome in the United States after much of the American southwest was largely snatched from Mexico in wars based on the United States' desire to annex Texas to extend slavery. The curriculum glosses over the brutal conditions Chinese immigrants faced in the construction of railroads across the continental US, or Japanese

Americans being forced into internment camps once the country declared war against Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In the news cycles, critical race theory has been declared as staunchly anti-American. Many states have issued and passed legislation to ban the teaching of critical race theory, although America has never taught the ramifications of its imperial history, and CRT was never a part of the curriculum nor used in teacher education programs. These attacks on CRT are misguided attempts of partisan politics to divert attention away from the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection and shy away from viewing racism as a systemic issue synonymous with America.

I plan to use what I have learned in the MA program to inform my teaching practices. CRT will be a framework used as I continue as a secondary English educator. My education has empowered me to work in my corner of the education field to encourage other educators to use more inclusive literature so every student can see themselves in the selected texts. Students deserve the opportunity for school to be a safe space to discuss complex issues and have their teachers model what dissonance truly looks like. There must be an end to binary modes of thinking, especially when it hinders Truth. Cornel West expounds on the need for veritas, “You need the courage and the vision to tell the truth in your own fallible way.”



Devontae Wilson

Dr. Rachel Rickard Rebellino

English 6800 YA Lit.

May 15, 2020

“The Elephant in the Classroom”

*Rationale*

The equality (or lack thereof) conversation in the racially polarized climate of the American political landscape is challenging to approach. But difficulty does not mean conversations should not be had because it is within honest dialogue that empathy, understanding, and ultimately reconciliation is formed. The secondary classroom, if properly maintained, is a space where students confront and confirm their identities. Through the study of literature, students are allowed the opportunity to read stories that explore the human condition. Students are the human capital of our work, and their education is at the center of what we do, “For the sake of our students, though, I believe in risk-taking with texts. It’s important to explore, experiment, and challenge ourselves to read stories beyond the limits of our experience” (Nachowitz 18). From here, the student can compare characters in literature to their own realities, but the problem begins with a lack of inclusivity in the literature taught in classrooms. The English classroom has traditionally been centered around the classics and male, Euro-centric literature, which conditions both the teacher and student to accept the lack of minority representation in the experiences being explored.

The idea for this project was sparked because of the rejection of Angie Thomas' *The Hate U Give* as a potential novel to be included in the ever popular literature circles because of the lower lexile score, but the intended audience for the novel based on the interest level is between 7th and 12th grade students. As a young, African American male secondary English teacher, the life experiences between myself and my colleagues are vastly different, but the students who are primarily white and Hispanic frequently bring their questions pertaining to the disparities affecting minorities to class. Thus, the inclusion of *The Hate U Give* could potentially serve as a window in which to explore real problems largely affecting the African American community. I have never heard of a suggested title being rejected solely on the basis of lexile level. As a matter of fact, a staple of the curriculum is *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom. The novel is a great read selected because of its central focus on the meaning of life told from the perspective of a brilliant sociology professor, but the lexile level is relatively low. After being denied the first novel, I suggested Dr. Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* because there were already enough copies in the novel room, meaning not needing to buy more copies, and the text was a classic centered on "a sequence of lessons about resisting racist oppression." *Caged Bird* was rejected because according to my colleagues and instructional coach Dr. Angelou lacks literary merit. Disillusioned, the very real possibility came to mind that the texts were rejected not because of their lexile level or literary merit, but because the books delved into uncomfortable topics that made my white counterparts uncomfortable.

White supremacy conjures mental images of slaves picking cotton and serving massa, cross-burning klansmen lynching African Americans, or "Bull" Connor leading segregationists in defense of their racial status quo. The vast majority of Americans condemn those actions as inhumane and not representative of our inalienable rights: life, liberty and the pursuit of

happiness. Robin DiAngelo, sociologist and academic, confronts the good-bad binary associated with racist ideology:

White people in North America live in a social environment that protects and insulates them from race-based stress. This insulated environment of racial protection builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress, leading to what I refer to as White Fragility. White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves. These moves include the outward display of emotions such as anger, fear, and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence, and leaving the stress-inducing situation. These behaviors, in turn, function to reinstate white racial equilibrium. (DiAngelo 54)

DiAngelo calls the majority populace into identifying internalized racist beliefs as not a condemnation of their moral character but in recognizing the comfortability that stems from white privilege. In the contexts of the English classroom, white fragility is weaponized as a defense mechanism against diverse literature. My personal examples were not a condemnation of my coworkers, but their reactions were of white solidarity in the face of change and coming to terms with a text that could very well challenge that. The literary canon is the primary standard in which to gauge literary merit. Literary merit can be defined as books that have value as art, and these texts are beyond storytelling and reach the soul of the human condition. Literary merit and lexile level are coded language for the white experience is quintessential experience and is how we define art.

Bishop writes a very concise, monumental article, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” which is the basis of my research and the cornerstone of why the literature read in classrooms needs to be diversified. The lack of representation paints a dreary picture because minority students “learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in our society” (Bishop 1) because of their lack of inclusion. Children from the dominant social group will inevitably grow up in a dangerous bubble, insulated from the reality of an experience different from their own. This lack of understanding is what breeds fear and distrust of minorities and feeds into the dangerous single story. Bishop counters the narrative of non-Standard English, which is negatively evaluated in literature on the basis of lexile levels. Bishop argues, “changing their voices to Standard English would take away a large part of their distinctiveness” (2). A selection of novels outside of the confines of the literary canon provides an avenue for the instructor to confront unconscious bias. By not having the conversation, racism will always be an overwhelming, unresolved social problem. Continued silence from the people who are complicit and condoning systemic oppression speaks volumes.

With the denial of diverse literature into the traditional literature circle, my plan is to create a social justice unit centered on four novels: *Dear Martin*, *All American Boys*, *The Hate U Give*, and *On the Come Up*. The aforementioned texts allow for dialogue from characters like those of my own. Freire (1970) wrote, “Knowledge emerges...through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry [human beings] pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.” The literature circle is a great modality that allows for student choice, and the students are also able to work in groups, encouraging collaboration. In the study “Critical Inquiries into Politicized Issues,”

teachers used children's literature to support inquiry into the Black Lives Matter movement; "[e]ach of the teachers who participated in this work documented how their students' ability to consider human complexity and to see their common humanity with people who were both similar to and different from them emerged through inquiries with books" (Cueto 39). The goal is to humanize minorities in children's literature. Prejudices are justified by false, one-sided rhetoric, and the monopoly on children's and YA literature is a tool to maintain the status quo. The fight for diverse literature is ultimately a fight for human rights. To be seen as human is to be seen as equal. "When we face challenges to diverse book selections, our response can rightly be that we wish for every child to feel, as Walter Dean Myers once said, "as if they are part of America's dream, that all the rhetoric is meant for them, and that they are wanted in this country" (W.D. Myers, 2014). Ultimately, this is why stories still matter, and always will" (Thomas 118).

The novels selected for the literature circles unit: *Dear Martin*, *All American Boys*, *The Hate U Give*, and *On the Come Up* were all chosen because of the specific topics addressed within the character development and conversations had in relation to what was happening in the plot. YA novels are more relatable, thus easier to connect with students versus a non-fiction text. The content requires delicate handling, thus YA is more conducive to that because of the characters and setting. *The Hate U Give* and *On the Come Up* both take place in the fictional Garden Heights, which could be any poor, black neighborhood because many of the social ills are seen in marginalized communities across the country. Even as a teacher, Garden Heights reminded me of inner-city Baton Rouge where I grew up with the drugs, violence, and the constant message, "get out of here and make something of yourself." Staar and Bri, the main black female protagonists

of their respective novels, grow up in different families and attend high schools in different parts of the city, but they face an issue exemplified in Watson's "Talking Back":

You come from a world that stigmatizes Black people, and then you come to a school w[h]ere some of the people carry that stigma, like, "Black girls are this," or "Black girls are loud," or "Black girls are ratchet." I think that persona is like, well they're telling me to act like that, so let me act like that, because when we do act right, they're like, "Why are you acting so proper?" . . . That stigma that Black girls are supposed to be loud and ratchet and ghetto and don't have any class or manners and things like that, I feel that stigma is what holds us back, like well, they want me to act like that, so let me just act the way they want me to act.

Staar and Bri can tell the story of being a Black girl under these assumptions. Staar consistently makes the difference between her school and home self because she wants to be accepted at her nearly all-white, private school on the other side of town. Bri, on the other hand, aspires to be a female rapper and fill the shoes of her father, a Garden Heights legend killed too soon. Justyce, the protagonist of *Dear Martin*, is a great text because he speaks to the microaggressions that come with being Black in white spaces. Although he's the top of his class and every bit as smart as his affluent classmates, many of them see him as inferior and only having a space at their school because of his skin color and not for his brilliant mind. *All American Boys* tells alternating perspectives of a town divided over an incident of police brutality with Rashad and Quinn sharing their sides and back stories. Quinn's story works particularly well because the reader can see him start to change his ideas and force him to question how race plays a role in the lives of his Black teammates. The four novels suggested in this unit speak directly to issues of

codeswitching, negative stereotypes of Black women, respectability politics, microaggressions, misconceptions about affirmative action, and unconscious bias.

### *Literary Analysis*

In Nic Stone's *Dear Martin*, the primary focus of the literary analysis will come from the conversations between Sarah-Jane (SJ) and Jared challenging Jared's beliefs of his inherent superiority created from the positive culture in Doc's class. Dr. Jarius "Doc" Dray is the teacher for the societal evolution course at Braselton Prep. SJ and Jared debate the discussion prompt of the day: all men are created equal. After a tense beginning, Doc exclaims, "I'll come right out with it, then. Do you guys feel we've achieved full "equality" with regards to race? Come on, guys. This is a safe space. Nothing said here today leaves this room" (Stone 23). Doc has created a classroom culture strong enough that his students feel comfortable expressing their ideologies, and his prolonged silence, except to guide the conversation, gives space for organic conversation to be spoken. "Ideally, schools are places where students come to understand civic engagement and to develop their political identities (Syvertsen et al., 2009). Teachers play a crucial role in providing learning experiences that move students toward creating and developing these identities" (Cueto 38). Fast forward a few chapters later to Justyce's acceptance into Yale, Jared, the epitome of white privilege, responds to Doc's question, "I'd like to discuss how affirmative action discriminates against members of the majority...I'm ranked number two in our class, I'm captain of the baseball team, I do community service on weekends, and I got higher test scores than Justyce...yet he got into Yale early action, and I didn't. I know for a fact it's because I'm white and he's black" (Stone 59). By this statement, Jared assumes his superiority over Justyce as more

intelligent on the basis of race, and he doesn't recognize his implicit bias. SJ goes on, "Because it negates his assumption that because he's white and you're black, he's more intelligent than you are" (Stone 60). As representative of a widely-held belief, Jared contends the unfairness of affirmative action as taking spots away from deserving white students. Jared never congratulates Justyce on his acceptance. He continues, "He took a spot I didn't get because Yale has to fill a quota-" (Stone 61). This conversation has transpired in my own classroom, and the white students although low-income, contend that financial aid is more abundant for their minority counterparts. Never mind that those students don't plan to attend college in the first place. Jared, like my own students, fails to see that even if Justyce was accepted into Yale in part because of his race, access ain't inclusion.

In their novel *All American Boys* Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely explore what it means to be American. Although written decades ago, Bishop's writing is relevant to troubling questions, "Who owns public discourse? Whose America is this? Who can be considered American?" (Krishnaswami 1). How do the different interpretations of what it means to be "American" affect public discourse? Similarly, books can disrupt and challenge ideas about diversity through multifaceted and intersecting identities, settings, cultural contexts, and histories. They can place diverse characters at these crucial intersections and give them the power to reframe their stories. Through the fictional world, they can make us question the assumptions and practices of our own real world" (Krishnaswami 2). English, the star African American point guard, confronts Quinn for defending Paul's beating Rashad, "White boy like you can just walk away whenever you want. Everyone just sees you as Mr. All-American boy, and you can just keep on



walking, thinking about other things. Just keep on living, like this shit doesn't even exist" (Reynolds 176). Guzzo goes on to praise Quinn for maintaining their racial solidarity. Quinn's privilege is evidenced by his ability to ignore those inequalities as not his problem and shift focus. Jill challenges Quinn for his silence and not even watching the viral video of Paul beating Quinn. The video serves as a window into an experience unlike his own. After a lot of internal dialogue, Quinn comes to a realization, "...Hell, they were probably afraid of people like me. I didn't blame them. I'd be afraid too, even if I was a frigging house like Tooms. But I didn't have to be because my shield was that I was white. It didn't matter that I knew Paul. I could be all the way across the country in California and I'd still be white, cops and everyone else would still see me as just a "regular kid," an "All-American" boy. "Regular." "All American." White. Fuck" (Reynolds 180). Colin Kaepernick was ostracized for his determination to silently sit during the national anthem. He is deemed irreverent, name tarnished in the media, and fans even burned his jersey because he spoke up about police brutality. Although exercising his first amendment right, Kaepernick's protest is construed in a way to steal his political voice by deeming him un-American.

*All American Boys* addresses respectability politics in the relationship between Rashad and his father, David. After Rashad has been hospitalized, his father, a former soldier and police officer, tries to rationalize the brutality his son faced. Rashad recounts the events, "But Dad, he had on that Son, *you aren't telling me everything* look. It was clear to him, I had to have done something wrong to bring this on. "Were your pants saggin?" Dad interrogated, now back over by the door. "But they don't know that," Dad said. "What they see is what he presents. And it sounds like he presented himself as just

another-” (Reynolds 40). David is the symbol of respectability politics and preaches to his son, Rashad, that he has to be twice as good. As a whole, the black community has sought to police one another to conform to standards established by the white male patriarchy in the hopes of protection from systemic injustices. The article, “Cracking the Codes of Black Power Struggles: Hacking, Hacked, and Black Lives Matter,” examines respectability politics in the Black liberation movement, “of central importance is deconstructing archaic conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality, and reimagining what “Black life” means in a world that does not love Black people. This political project calls into question “the politics of respectability,” as coined by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, and teases out the complexities of “anti-Black racism” (Green-Hayes 68). There is a lot of respectability politics in general in the black community. It just happens because the black community has for so long been in a struggle for survival. Respectability is not the bullet-proof vest to stem the bullets of prejudice and ignorance. For so long blacks had to choose the best representative or “token” in order to shine. The notion of the talented tenth is a forerunner for respectability politics. The talented tenth is an intentionally designed measure of producing the best and brightest of the African American community as representatives to serve as tokens in majority-owned spaces. This article begs the question, “Is success in America by black bodies predicated on the white-washing of the collective black experience?” (This is my own personal question. I have more questions than answers now.)

In *The Hate U Give*, Angie Thomas does a very thorough job of depicting code switching, the practice of shifting the language you use or the way you express yourself in your conversations. To properly examine the code switching by Starr, the protagonist,

the reader must fully understand the coexistence of multiple levels of oppression affecting marginalized peoples through an intersectionality framework. Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdisciplinary systems of discrimination and oppression. Starr attends a party with Kenya, who promptly ditches her, “As long as I play it cool and keep to myself, I should be fine. The ironic thing is though, at Williamson I don’t have to “play it cool”--I’m cool by default because I’m one of the only black kids there. I have to earn coolness in Garden Heights, and that’s more difficult than buying retro Jordans on release day. Funny how it works with white kids though. It’s dope to be black until it’s hard to be black” (Thomas, *The Hate* 11). It is in the very beginning where Starr establishes the necessity of code switching in order to navigate her two different worlds: Garden Heights and Williamson. After having a tumultuous weekend by witnessing the murder of her second childhood bestfriend, Starr is back at school as normal Starr as Williamson Starr, “Williamson Starr doesn’t use slang--if a rapper would say it, she doesn’t say it, even if her white friends do. Slang makes them cool. Slang makes her “hood.” Williamson Starr holds her tongue when people piss her off so nobody will think she’s the “angry black girl”...Basically, Williamson Starr doesn’t give anyone a reason to call her ghetto” (Thomas, *The Hate* 71). Starr doesn’t talk about the murder to her school friends because of the way she would be perceived. It is in the switch where, “I was able to apply intersectionality as a tool to analyze the “dynamics of power” (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795) through a process that was heavily iterative” (Gill 69).

The friendship between Starr, Maya, and Hailey is largely dominated by the power dynamics of Hailey being the white racial majority. Maya and Hailey both come from an upper middle-class background, and Starr's family is working class. There is a level of misunderstanding and division because of this. Maya and Hailey rarely cross over into Starr's world in Garden Heights, but Starr constantly has to make the trek into the more affluent world. Hailey commits microaggressions against both girls, especially Starr. Hailey unfollows Starr's Tumblr because pictures of the Emmett Till trial makes her uncomfortable, makes a questionable remark about blacks and fried chicken, and even takes advantage of Khalil's death by protesting in order to get out of class. While eating breakfast with her mother, Starr goes on to explain how much her friendship with Hailey is affecting her mental health. Lisa defensively responds, "I've never liked how you followed her like you can't think for yourself. Difference. Remember that drum set you bugged me to buy...Hold up, though. Didn't you tell me you wanted to play guitar in this 'band,' but Hailey said you should play drums...Last year you begged me to let you color your hair purple. Why, Starr?" (Thomas, *The Hate* 262). With a father like Maverick, it's difficult to understand how Starr doesn't accept what Hailey has shown about herself, but Starr's code-switching clouds her vision. Starr's whole narrative is not wanting to be seen as "ghetto" or to have her actions from her rich, white friends described as "being sensitive."

Brianna "Bri" Jackson wrestles with perception either as invisibility or hypervisibility in Angie Thomas' second novel, *On The Come Up*. As a student at the Midtown School of the Arts, Bri feels invisible because around her very intelligent, talented friends and classmates. Bri is paralyzed by the fear of not being good enough,

especially because everyone loved her brother, “I’ve never been able to match Trey here at Midtown. They still have programs and newspaper clippings on display from where he starred in *A Raisin in the Sun*. I’m surprised they haven’t renamed Midtown “The Trey Jackson School of the Arts Because We Loved His Ass That Much” (Thomas, *Come Up* 11). Bri’s invisibility and comparison issues are symptoms or displays of being affected by imposter syndrome, reflects a belief that you’re an inadequate and incompetent failure despite evidence that indicates you’re skilled and quite successful. Outside of her fame as a rapper, Bri never reports her major successes, and the only time she is visible at school is for disciplinary issues: kicked out of class by teachers, scolded for not being highly motivated, and manhandled by her school’s security guards. Bri is symbolic of the desire by African Americans, “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me...It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often rather wearing on the nerves” (Ellison 1). In the instances of Bri’s hypervisibility, she is dehumanized. In her moments of impulse and rage at being misunderstood and unseen, everyone views her for what she is not. In her conversation with Aunt Pooh, “Ever since Long called me a “hoodlum,” it’s like the word’s branded on my forehead, and I can’t get rid of it...I pull my knees closer. “At least I wouldn’t be invisible there” (Thomas, *Come Up* 83). Not being able to attend Garden High by her mother, Bri knows that at least there should be seen as Lil’ Law. After returning to school after the candy debacle, stare in surprise as if she’s supposed to be in prison, stare in disbelief, and whisper “drug dealer” as she passes. But it is in rap, an art form stepped in the tradition of oral story-telling, that Bri obtains hypervisibility where she is able to bear her soul about being unseen. Amongst her peers

in the Black/Latinx Student Coalition, Bri is hypervisible as the symbol through which their message can be displayed, but she emphatically declines:

“I don’t wanna be that person!” I scream so loud that every single one of them hears me. “They’re just gonna explain the shit away! Don’t you get that? Sonny, you know they will! That’s what they do. Hell, they’re already doing it with the ‘drug dealer’ rumors. This gets in the news? They’ll mention every time I’ve been sent to the office, every goddamn suspension. Hell, they’ll use those Ring videos. Anything to make it seem like what happened was okay ‘cause I’m not from shit! You think I wanna deal with that?” (Thomas, *Come Up* 240).

In the media’s quest to make sense of the incident, Bri will be villainized because there are many who spout the narrative of *what did she do to deserve it*. People across the nation and parents of students at Midtown will see Bri for their preconceived notions. The narrator explains her anger well, “You ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you’re a part of all the sound and anguish, and you strike out with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it’s seldom successful” (Ellison 2).

In both of Angie Thomas’ books presented here, the female protagonists champion movements for change, but they are also both caught in the White gaze and perceptions of how girls should behave. Viewing the realities of their experiences through a Black Feminist lens provides specific insight into both Staar and Bri. The intersectionality of race, gender, and socioeconomic status make for unique challenges not experienced by Black boys or White girls in their respective schools. By almost every teacher/administrator Bri is seen as an average, sassy Black girl failing to live up to the

expectations of her brother Tre except for Mrs. Murray. Mrs. Murray is described as “one not to play with” and as a teacher with high expectations for Bri. The issue is many school leaders view “[Black girls] through a deficit lens—ignoring many of the positive attributes that serve to sustain them” (Watson 239). A significant moment in the plot surrounding Bri’s story is her being accosted and man-handled by the school’s security guards, Long and Tate. Although at a magnet school for the gifted and talented, Bri and her friends face the realities of “harsher school policies in the wake of desegregation, and safety practices that include bringing law enforcement into schools have combined to create the school-to-prison pipeline, in which troubled students are subject not just to detention, but to suspensions, expulsion, and in-school arrests” (Kendall 194). The media paints a picture primarily of Black men being brutalized by law enforcement, but Bri is an example that even as a teenage girl her blackness defines her as guilty until proven innocent. Bri’s actual infraction, selling candy on campus, was minor, and “instead of counseling or intervention services, schools are increasingly using law enforcement tactics to deal with misbehavior, even for minor incidents” (Kendall 194). Even after a student was racially profiled and assaulted, the principal doubles down on her zero tolerance policies by confiscating Bri’s candy, a three-day suspension, and has her dignity stripped away in front of the student body. Interestingly, despite the different location and demographics of their school, Staar faces “perceptions seemingly conceived prior to [her] entering class and were deeply entrenched in the interactions [she] had” (Watson 241). In community with the other students, Staar leaves apart of herself in Garden Heights to assimilate to the culture of her rich, private school. Maya, Staar’s Asian best friend, confesses about Hailey’s change of behavior, “No. All the ‘black

stuff,' she called it. The petitions. The Black Panther pictures. That post on those four little girls who were killed in that church. The stuff about that Marcus Garvey guy. The one about those Black Panthers who were shot by the government" (Thomas, *The Hate* 250). Staar, Maya, and Hailey are all heterosexual, young women, but the intersectionality of their race creates a barrier separating Staar and Maya from Hailey. Consistently throughout the novel, Hailey chooses whiteness over their shared femininity and uses it as the bar her friends climb to reach. With both Bri and Staar, their Blackness is dehumanizing. It negates their right to be children and make mistakes. It strips them of the innocence associated with their White counterparts. Blackness is vilifying.

### ***Teaching Unit***

The proposed unit centered on social justice will be based on utilizing literature circles, an effective student-centered pedagogical method allowing for "elements that focus on (1) choice, (2) member-driven questioning and discussion, (3) personal connections, and (4) teacher-as-facilitator" (Moskal 56). The purpose of literature circles is to increase literacy, promote independent reading, and open the classroom up to critical discussion. The unit begins with a brief synopsis of the novels and having the students rank their top choices of the novel and explaining that choice. Moskal also notes in "I'm Gonna Buy All These Books," "This first day builds excitement for the unit because students have control over their learning and time. They feel their voices matter" (56). Once a novel and groups are decided, students' first assignment is to examine both the title and book cover. This allows students to engage with the text before ever opening the novel and make predictions about what they are going to read. Activating prior



knowledge also by questioning their knowledge about social justice, black culture, and affirmative action.

The structure of the unit is to be read through a lens of reading with compassion. In “How to Read (with Compassion): An English Teacher Explores Compassionate Reading through Thich Nhat Hanh’s Mindfulness,” Mackie explores what it means to read with compassion, “deeply encountering a text through the lines of compassion bridges the gap for students between the head and the heart and between reason and emotion. In bridging this gap, I see the necessity of exercising compassion to create a consciousness capable of reading through the lines” (3). Compassion allows students and the instructor to come to a place of understanding our own learning and ourselves; it is exploring the genius within. The depth needed to truly delve into the unit’s readings requires a level of mindfulness of every person present. One practical approach to the literature circle unit is using the double-entry log, enabling students to record their responses to a text as they read. Students write down quotes or phrases from the novel of their choice and write their reactions to that quote in the second column. This method is designed to help students be active readers and increase comprehension.

The students need direct instruction detailing what the reading should look like. Literature circles are a time for active reading because “Rosenblatt (1995) reminded us that a book without a reader is just words on a page. Readers bring to any text their values, emotions, and experiences. These create a “never-to-be-duplicated combination” (p. 30) that results in the transaction between reader and text” (Johnson et. al, 570). As students actively read, their focus should be on the characters because it is here that students are able to connect with the text on a personal level. Annotations are a necessity

while reading for purpose. Annotating is simply writing notes in the margins of a text as you read, and it serves a dual purpose: locate and interpret the meaning of a text and provide a variety of points to keep in mind. The annotations come from sticky notes pasted on the inside of a novel that isn't your own, but I have developed a habit of writing in all of my own books. A separate but equally effective method could be flagging quotes, "Students read with sticky notes in hand, using these to flag power quotes they find as they read. Power quotes are just that: something in the text that feels powerful. This can be a line of text that stands out, a sentence, even a paragraph that evokes an emotional response" (Johnson et. al, 576). For those students flagging quotes, I would suggest numbering them and writing down what about that quote made it worth flagging. Thus, the power quotes tend to develop into a common theme that the reader can then read specifically for.

By default, literature circles require students to work together in small groups but also interact with the whole class. Each person in the group has a job: discussion director, literary luminary, summarizer, lexicographer, and illustrator. The Discussion Director has two jobs. First, before the meeting, the DD must write at least FIVE open ended questions about the section of the novel. Second, during the meeting, the DD is in charge of the flow of the meeting. The DD decides who shares their work when, and keeps the meeting flowing and is responsible for keeping everyone on task. The Literary Luminary's job is to find at least FIVE sentences or passages from the section that are important to the story – the passage may give important information about the character, about the plot, about the theme or about the setting. The Summarizer will write a one to two paragraph summary of the section. Make sure the summary starts at the beginnings,

continues with the middle and ends at the end of the section. Include *significant* details, not every detail. Be specific. During the meeting, the Summarizer will read their summary to the group and make sure everyone agrees with the summarization. The Vocabulary Enricher or Lexicographer's job is to find six to eight words that are new or unusual in the section. The VE will write the word and then go to a dictionary to find the *definition that fits the context of what was read*. During the meeting, the VE will read their words and definitions to the group. The Illustrator's job is to create a visual representation of either an important scene from the section or the section as a whole. The Illustrator can draw or use collage to create their illustration. During the meeting, the Illustrator will share their representation with the group.

The teacher has an important role in the literature circle as the facilitator. Although the teacher isn't lecturing as a primary means of disseminating information, the role turns into being able to ask the right questions in order to engage students. English education has the unique privilege of experiencing and starting much-needed conversations, "Garcia and O'Donnell-Allen (2015) refer to this experience as "wobbling" and argue that "adopting a pose of culturally proactive teaching requires humility and an innate willingness to accept wobbling" (p. 19). We believe that in order to effectively work toward change we, as teachers, must also be vulnerable, and, perhaps more important, for student voices to be heard, we must be humble" (Rickard Rebellino et. al, 138). With diverse literature, the teacher must be willing to place our expertise down for a stance of humility.

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### “Black Masculinity: The King and Neo-slave”

African Americans, the descendants of slaves in the continental United States, have the misfortune of their cultural heritage being ripped away with inhumane journeys to the New World. The transatlantic slave trade was created as a means of furthering imperialist desires to colonize foreign lands for their natural resources. After establishing European settlements in the New World, the indigenous populations did not have an immunity against diseases that systematically wiped-out entire towns; Europe set its sights on West Africa to purchase, steal, and enslave an entire work force to produce cotton, tobacco, and sugar for export back to the mother countries. It's from those various African peoples being identified as uniformly Black with no regard for their culture, spiritual beliefs, or native language that birthed the collective Black community. The very fabric of our cultural identity and struggles with “who am I?” are magnified by not having an origin story. As orphaned, cast away Africans on the shores of a white man's country built by but not for us; there is no respite in a world created in bigotry and anti-blackness.. The white, hegemonic power structure sought to fill that void and assimilate Black, Indigenous, People of Color to the hotdog eating, cherry pie loving, gun slinging, xenophobic, closet racist, capitalist system that is the good ol' US of A. African Americans sought to see themselves represented in film and not misrepresented as Uncle Tom or Sambo. In *Scripting the Black Masculine Body*, Jackson explains, “Black bodies were inscribed with a set



of meanings, which helped to perpetuate the scripter's racist ideology. Through these scripts, race gradually became its own corporeal politics" (9). The scripting, writing racist ideologies on black bodies, wasn't just devastating because of the stereotypes, but because it is also about the commodification of those bodies. Those black bodies being used as entertainment. Uncle Tom "would come to be known as a consciously obedient character who was attempting to be Christlike in his merciful understanding and tolerance of his oppressor's condescending and malicious behaviors" (Jackson 30). The Uncle Tom is bound up in colorblind ideology, seeking to identify as raceless without attachments to the larger Black community. His plan is centered around individual achievement with no intention of lifting others up as he climbs. Sambo was "known as a jovial sluggard and raconteur who kept the audience "in stitches" because of his perpetual antics" (Jackson 26). He was unquestionably loyal to Whites, and the character's larger purpose was to be of use in minstrel shows with excessive makeup to over emphasize his afro features and reassure the White audience of the normalcy in depicting black bodies this way. Black Americans sought to change their perception in the larger media, "notably, blaxploitation cinema challenged Hollywood's stereotypical portrayal of blacks, demonstrating that they were much more than the tom, coon, and mammy caricatures that historically circumscribed African American performers" (Lawrence and Butters 10). The Black Power movements sought to affirm blacks' humanity and be a source of nonprofit organization to affect change in underfunded communities of color Stockley Carmichael sought to reframe the civil rights struggle because nonviolence in the face of increasing violence and political resistance caused plenty of the younger generation to want to fight back. Carmichael is quoted, "It's time we stand up and take over. Don't be afraid. Don't be ashamed. We want Black Power!" It was a call for not only basic rights under protection of the law, but a call to change the living conditions and

opportunities afforded to Black people. Outside of that, Black Power was about challenging racist ideologies scripted on BIPOC bodies and seeing the brilliance and beauty one brought to the world. It was in stark contrast to the respectability politics preached by leaders like Dr. King. Riding on the heels of Black Power, directors such as Melvin Van Peebles created blaxploitation films centering black heroes, i.e., Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song, which opens with a title card that reads, "This film is dedicated to all the Brothers and Sisters who have had enough of the Man" (Lawrence and Butters 4). The blaxploitation film era of the 1970s saved Hollywood from financial collapse and highlighted an untapped audience in the poor, urban Black communities across America's inner cities (Lawrence and Butters 5). The earlier films were critical in "establishing the majority of the conventions that defined ensuing blaxploitation films - a black hero or heroine, a predominantly black urban setting, black supporting characters, a contemporary rhythm-and-blues soundtrack, and plot themes addressing the black experience in contemporary American society" (Lawrence and Butters 3). Black exploitation is centered on the Black narrative created by the white entertainment industry, explaining the overt stereotyping of an experience not their own. Within this genre of film and onward into modern black storytelling, the director showcases a spectrum of black masculinity from kingly to the neo-slave.

Masculinity or more specifically white masculinity has the privilege of being the representative of our nation's ideal. Filmmakers, directors, and producers are predominantly white men controlling this major industry as, "narratives of whiteness had been overshadowed by the greater urgency - as proposed in the Western, the Indian, and the Civil War genres - of fabricating a nationalist mythology in popular culture" (Robinson 2). In Westerns, white men were the law, and all conflict was resolved with the use of the Winchester rifle and quick draw of the six-shooter. Problematically, that idea of vigilantism was so wildly showcased because, "the

law, of course, was a fantastic artifice, a mythic concentration of a fabulous white imaginary” (Robinson 3). Armed imagination with no real accountability can lead to volatile men accosting people of color in extremely dangerous conditions. The story of Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy murdered by angry white men, was a prime example, and there is a continual repetition of that cycle of violence. White masculinity is revealed in being the protector of the innocent white virgin and the antagonist to blackness. The white male hero needs a white woman to save because, “the character’s retrieval from an erotic immersion in darkness was often accompanied by the transformation of an effeminate white male hero into a heroically masculine figure” (Robinson 4). The white male father figure in the plantation genre is associated with the slave owner, “unlike the blacks in the real world of the Depression years, the slaves of the plantation genre were seldom sad, rebellious or militant. Their merriment exposed the essential and necessary paternalism of their masters; and frequently the slaves were so enthralled with slavery that they broke into song or dance” (Robinson 4). In film, the white man is dependent upon women and minorities in order to establish his identity. Without the damsel in distress and dark foe needing to be stopped, there is no need for the “hero.” As such, blackness runs in parallel to white masculinity.

The presentation of blackness is centered around jungle films, the plantation genre, and the criminality of black bodies. The villain is presented in darkness: covered face, dark clothes, black face, or maybe even as an animal. That black man is King Kong falling in love with Ann Darrow and the cavalry rides to stop the ape all the while protecting the virgin. The jungle films “align monstrosity with darkness and position the white woman as the figure who negotiates the chasm between the white and black worlds. Her role is ambiguous. She is under threat and in need of white male care and she is liminal, aligned with and likened to monsters, blacks, and

jungle creatures” (Robinson 3). There is the notion of white women wanting to live on the wild side or rebel against the white male order, and black masculinity has to be put down in order to restore order. The reality of blackness was omitted in the plantation genre with “the Red Summer, the judicial lynching of the Scottsboro men, the annual tabulation of actual lynchings, the constant litany of official and mob violence against Blacks, were figments of reality which had no place in American films” (Robinson 4). As with the films, the United States has this way of omitting the uncomfortable realities of the nation’s controversial history and choosing to live in the fantasy of the American creed. The Constitution is the embodiment of our nation’s core values, but it not only sets a precedent for protection against tyranny but condemns and disenfranchises the citizenship of the criminalized. There is a level of rebellion associated with Black bodies, “and in lieu of a deliberate interrogation of the political and moral dilemmas which attended the failures of an integrationist activism, independent and then established film-makers trivialized the troubled activists of the movement into the now familiar male counter-revolutionary creatures: the male prostitute, the vigilante cops, the dope pusher, and the gangster” (Robinson 5). Even Gravedigger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson were relegated to the realms of counter-revolutionaries because of their style of policing to protect and serve Harlem and their insistence to go around the system in order to return the poor community’s stolen money. The Italian gang leader is an accepted fabric of the social order in the minority neighborhood, but the ingenuity of their plan to maintain a promise to the community is frowned upon. The two detectives’ connections to Harlem in paramount to their identity and connectedness to the citizens they serve.

Black masculinity is inextricably linked to urban spaces. The walls of the inner city speak loudly, “the prominence of the ghetto in these films serves as “not only background for narrative

but also is active in influencing the events unfolding onscreen. The complicated and interwoven dynamics of these films become clearer when it is understood that the city enables these events” (Engels 66). The cityscape tells a story of the protagonist in contrast to her vastness and the thousands of minorities lived within those limits. The projects house the stories, abuse and systemic trauma of living in an oppressive system. Black directors rely on these stories to speak boldly even as the camera pans across the horizon while focusing on the protagonist, “Shaft’s emergence from the subway symbolically represented the arrival of a new type of black hero never seen before in mainstream cinema while simultaneously establishing authenticity” (Engels 67). The intended Black audience understands the community of, lifestyle in, and culture surrounding the inner-city working as a sense of “street authenticity.” The locales are intended to strengthen blackness in order to fight against the smothering grip of whiteness. The settings of black films are significant because the mental imagery of suburbia excludes blackness. White folks with the courage to show up in urban spaces are treated as outsiders because there is so often the disconnect between that shared lived experience. African American audiences connect from a different place of understanding, thus directors “establish a level of authenticity needed to appeal to them, they needed to portray a familiarity with and understanding of the unique characteristics and pressures associated with ‘hood life. While the characters and situations depicted in these works did not always appeal to audiences on a literal level, the authenticity allowed the works to successfully connect on a metaphorical level” (Engels 69). The experiences of “real blackness” are summed up as inescapable in the Negro Problem.

***American Denial: The Truth is Deeper than Black and White***

The truth of the American problem is deeper than skin tone, but it is a pervasive system founded in anti-blackness. Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish researcher, was brought to the United

States to objectively study and report on the Negro Problem at the behest of the Carnegie Foundation. To ask about the Negro Problem is to ask how blacks are a problem for whites, but Myrdal views this as the American Civilization problem: segregation, poverty and the color line. He had to try and rationalize the brutality and the oppression of Jim Crow with the rhetoric of the US Constitution and the American Creed. Whiteness felt discomfort in extreme racism and their response was denial of a reality different from their privileged existence. Whites wanted to believe in a well-ordered universe and seeing this country as anything outside of the patriotic message drilled into citizens from birth was completely devastating to a eurocentric worldview. Americans utter the Creed in a hypnotized way, but it didn't change their actions.

Race prejudice is at the core of the American Creed. The anti-blackness that was prevalent in slavery is still pervasive, but it has been revamped to fit into more acceptable rhetoric, "But what we have moved into today is a cultural narrative. And so, it's not that Blacks are unfit as a population or species, but the black culture is not fit. Those people don't really belong. They aren't really Americans. Those people aren't like us" (*American Denial*). Non-white is unAmerican. Viewing minorities in contrast to whiteness is a constant reminder of their ethnic identity. Derogatory language and racial slurs like the "N-word is the same way of saying you're the infinite other...It threatens our identity. At a prestigious institution like Princeton I felt safe. [the question is] what are you doing here in my space?" (*American Denial*).

Leaving aside our ideals and beliefs, what are we actually expressing with our practices? America is the parent that tells its citizens stories of ourselves to placate fears and not address the monster hiding under the bed. Otherness is expressed in the stigma of criminalization which eventually leads to the marginalized embracing and celebrating that stigma. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy about the ineptitude of blackness. The failure of the Civil Rights Movement to bring us

to a place where race was irrelevant to what happens in one's life is carried on in the spirit of the militancy of the Black Power movement.

*BlacKkKansman*

Ron Stallworth, the new Black police recruit, falls in contrast to some of the views of the Black Power movement, but his perspective falls in line with more integrationist thinking. Ron becomes the bridge connecting the two worlds, and that sentiment is evident in during the police chief's interview, "What will you do if you're called nigger? You'll have to be the Jackie Robinson of the Colorado Springs Police Department." Whiteness dictates that the responsibility of appropriately responding to being called a "nigger" was placed squarely on his shoulders. Ron's humanity was placed after, if not at all, the responses and feelings of his white coworkers. There was an added weight to Ron being the first, especially in the physically and emotionally challenging work of law enforcement. There is this fascination with black masculinity through the idolization of athletes on the field. In preparation for Flip's undercover identity as a white Ron Stallworth, the conversation shifts, "Jimmy, I always wanted to be black. All my heroes were black guys. Willie Mays. Basket catch. Wilt the Stilt. Record hundred points in one game. But you know my absolute favorite? O.J. Heisman pose. The Juice " (*BlacKkKansman*). The same organization that requires Ron to face overt discrimination proclaims how openly it loves his black body for talent and skill but not to be respected. The Organization, or the KuKluxKlan, had a goal of not naming who they are and staying discreet after their restructuring. Detective Zimmerman so easily integrated into the alt-right. As a white passing Jew, Flip was able to conform to racist conversations. A snippet of their initial conversation in the bar highlighted the language surrounding integration, "It wasn't long ago the sumo' bitches wasn't on TV. Don't forget about Uncle Ben and Aunt Jemima. I kinda like them niggers. Rice and pancakes... You

can't say this. You can't say that. Be nice. Negroes. Blacks. Why don't we just call them what they are? Fucking niggers" (*BlackKkKansman*). There was this sense of returning to the way things were with Blacks being relegated to the docile positions of slavery and Aunt Jemima being shackled to the hot kitchen stove. Uncle Ben was the help that harvested the very profitable rice of the Carolina lowlands. The racists had this fetishization of being able to refer to Blacks in dehumanizing language. Blacks brave enough to advocate for themselves like Kwame Ture and Patrice were labeled rabble rousers and targets of white supremacy. Ture was the force in coining the term, "Black Power," which was a calling card to empower the consistently downtrodden. Black Power called and forced blackness to be accepted as beautiful by black people. Ture, formerly Stokely Carmichael, had a kingly influence in spreading his pan-Africanist message.

Spike Lee inserts himself as a character through his choices as film director and the finalized script. He underscores the importance of having black masculinity displayed not only in the on-screen actors but as directors and producers. Spike Lee utilizes Sergeant Lee's combined whiteness and blue shield to intertwine an exceptional commentary about our America, "That's what Duke is pedaling now. It's, uh, becoming mainstream...I think it's another way to sell hate. Think about it. Affirmative action. Immigration. Crime. Tax reform. He says no one wants to be called a bigot anymore. I guess Archie Bunker made that too uncool. So the idea is, under all these issues, everyday Americans can accept it, support it, until eventually, one day, he gets somebody in the White House that embodies it." The effect would have been vastly different had Kwame, Patrice or even Det. Ron Stallworth openly came to this particular revelation. The director inserts a pointed statement through this example that white supremacy is progressing in a direction to muddy the waters by disguising itself as patriotic rhetoric. Lee uses the mise-en-



scene to consistently preach a message not verbally articulated. During every Klan meeting, there was Confederate paraphernalia and guns. Visually, Lee was driving home the point that the purpose of the Confederacy was not in fighting for states' right or preserving cultural heritage but the inherent right of states to own slaves. Every Klan member was always armed as an assertion of their second amendments rights. There is the obvious connection of gun rights to organizations like the National Rifle Association. Even amidst the pandemic, the armed response by white Americans to get the country back up and running so I can go to the barbershop and go partying with friends. David Duke and the Klansmen sit along this long table spread out with platters of food, and they are all facing the same direction. The set up was reminiscent of the Lord's Supper with Duke as the Christ figure to redeem the value of whiteness.

The policing system shows a denial to black masculinity and an affirmation to white supremacy. At the end of the film where the protagonist rests on his laurels after having defeated the bad guys and gotten the girl, Patrolman Andy Landers slides into the bar pointedly proclaiming how untouchable his skin and badge make him, "I could bust a cap in your black ass and nothing will be done about it. I wish the two of you would have been blown up instead of good white folks. Get it?" (*BlacKkKansman*). Ron and the other officers have the entire tirade on recording, and he is arrested on a litany of charges. There was an unyielding confidence that whiteness would protect him as it always had. The viewer would think that all is well when Det. Stallworth returns to the police department to standing ovations on his brilliant investigation until he gets into the room with the chief. Chief Bridges is initially congratulatory of their police work, but he commands, "Now, I need you, Ron Stallworth, to destroy all evidence of this investigation. We prefer if the public never knew about this investigation. Cease all further contact with the KuKluxKlan, effective immediately" (*BlacKkKansman*). Bridges' use of "we"

shows the decision was not solely his own but an invisible hand guiding how much truth is allowed to be discovered. The implied message is a connection between law enforcement, the military and white supremacist groups. Although well intentioned, Stallworth's integrationist proved him to be a puppet in a larger scheme. Stallworth lacks institutional power leaving him at the mercy of a corrupt judicial-legal system leaving breadcrumbs for him to nibble. Patrice's summation held true, "You can't change things from the inside. It's a racist system."

### *School Daze*

The conflict of *School Daze* stems from the fighting between defining black masculinity as seen in the polar opposites of Vaughn "Dap" Dunlap and Julian "Dean Big Brother Almighty" Eaves. The two contrasting characters exemplify the distinct ways BIPOC can position themselves, "The nationalist, or separatist, position illustrated by Jamal holds that people of color should embrace their culture and origins. He considers that he has a duty to contribute to the minority community. William also donates to several black causes. And, although he practices law in a white-dominated law firm on behalf of corporate clients, most of whom are white, he does pro bono work whenever possible on behalf of prison inmates, a large majority of whom are African American" (Delgado and Stefancic 67). Dap embodies the nationalist perspective in advocating for and challenging the inept school administration controlled by wealthy financiers. Dap is jokingly described by his friends as, "Malcolm. Nat Turner. Marcus Garvey. Frederick Douglas. Jesse Jackson. Farrakhan." Dap argues against the nepotism of black Greek life, which seeks to advance the black middle class in the professional world after graduation. Dean Big Brother Almighty is an assimilationist to his core. As an upperclassmen and the president of Gamma Phi Gamma, Dean is poised for a successful career after he graduates from Mission College. Dean doesn't identify with the African in African American because he's "just a dude

from Detroit, and he's never been to Mother Africa." Both men embody the colorism embedded in the Black community as a by-product of slavery. As a darker-skinned Black man, Dap relishes in the strength of his body and natural "nappy" hair as testament to the connection of a people looted from the shores of West Africa. As a light-skinned Black man, Dean exudes confidence with his product-filled hair to resemble a curl pattern similar to mulattoes. In order to further divide the two groups of actors, Spike Lee separated the two groups by skin tone with the "wannabes" given better housing accommodations than the "jigaboos." During the step show, the fight that erupts between the two groups of men was not scripted, but Lee ordered the cameras to keep rolling. Even as adults, black masculinity seeks identity and affirmation.

Darrell "Half-Pint" Dunlap is in a sort of coming-of-age story as his black masculinity is defined by his conditional acceptance into the Gamma fraternity. The big brothers demean Half-Pint as not a real man because of his lack of sexual experience. The fraternity prides itself on hypersexuality of its pledges. Half-Pint spends the vast majority of the film being degraded by his line brothers and asking women to have sex with him in order to further his desire to finally accepted. He is not denied sex because of his looks or inexperience, but because there is a lack of relationship and intimacy between himself and the women he objectifies. Half-Pint is sick like the vampiric force present in *Ganja and Hess* where "illness begets objectification" (Lawrence and Butters 109). Because of his sickness, he doesn't realize that he has further objectified the black women on his college campus as much as the white, patriarchal power structure. Half-Pint becomes a man after Dean convinces Jane to sleep with him to prove her devotion to him and the fraternity. After the deed is done, Dean rejects like a woman for the streets, and Half-Pint basks in his newfound sexuality. Dap shoves his cousin away after hearing the "good news" of his sexual encounter with Jane leading to the end of the film while Dap repeatedly yells, "Wake up!"

Dap argued with his girlfriend, but he was seen begging for forgiveness and would never objectify her like the colonizers. The entire school population awakens from the previous nights revelry to join on the common where Dap and Dean face-off. The incident of Dean essentially prostituting off Jane was the dividing factor between the two men, and it eventually came to define black masculinity in the film.

### *Get Out*

*Get Out* functions as a continuous double entendre as both a horror and neo-slave narrative describing black masculinity being abducted and utilized for the benefit of whiteness. Peele “exploits the slavery motif and critique[s] racial privilege and to expose it as a subversive and characteristic force of neoliberalism” (Boyd 36). Double consciousness is named and described in detail by W.E.B. DuBois’ *Souls of Black Folk* by which African Americans negated themselves when white American standards were accepted to measure oneself. The “sunken place” has place in both reality and the deep recesses of Chris’ consciousness. The application of, “the sunken place consists of situations in which a black person suppresses their true beliefs by either affirming or tacitly consenting to whatever her or his white peers or supervisors desires” (Cha-Jua 1). The sunken place is the sad reality of BIPOC in offices, classrooms, and workspaces around the country, and speaking out ensures the label of a problematic outcast. After a slave made it to the New World, one of the first signs of a colonized people was to change their name and thereby change their identity. That lack of identity defines “the sunken place as an allegory for psychological and socialization processes that alienate colonized people from their sense of self--their heritage, culture and consciousness. It is meant to convey the impact of Eurocentric education and media representation on African-descended people. The sunken place symbolizes the silencing often produced by racial microaggressions” (Cha-Jua 1).

Chris sets up his mind to be the perfect host in order to be colonized because he represses the emotions attached to his mother's passing. It is this vulnerability or the chink in his masculine exterior that serves as the entry point for his mind to be controlled.

On the surface level, neoliberalism seeps into the lives of people of color playing on the desire to be accepted. Neoliberalism "is far more frightening than vampires sucking on necks or zombies invading bodies, because the film's theme penetrates the psyche of racial supremacy that rationalizes the possession of other people's lives because the film's theme penetrates the psyche of racial supremacy that rationalizes the possession of other people's lives, exploiting their attributes and talents in order to achieve immortality" (Boyd 36). The beginning of the film foreshadows how Chris' body will be overtaken by white supremacy with the camera constantly bouncing between him in the shower and Rose in the bakery deciding on the food item she wants. Childish Gambino's "Redbone" plays in the background and the refrain repeats, "But stay woke/Niggas creeping/They gon find you/Gon' catch you sleepin/Ooh, now stay woke/Niggas creepin/Now don't you close your eyes." Upon Rose's arrival to Chris' apartment, he discovers that she has never revealed to her parents his ethnicity because she says "they are not racist." There is the implied message of Chris trusting Rose's assertion at face value because "liberalism can be a contradictory perspective when the issue of interracial love enters the conversation. "My father would have voted for Obama for a third term," Rose says, offering this statement as proof of her father's sincerity" (Boyd 37). The notion of Obama being offered as a sign of liberalism and acceptance of the post-racial society without realizing that the middle-class white America benefitted the most from Obama's presidency. Black masculinity in the position of leadership is accepted when he conforms to specific ideals benefitting the propagation of whiteness.

### *Black Panther*

T'Challa and Erik "Killmonger" Stevens embody the cultural conflict of being African versus African American and what that delineation means in the Black community. Killmonger has trained and fought as a Navy Seal and Black Ops mercenary in theatres across the globe. Killmonger is the symbol of indignation African Americans feel knowing that like N'Jadaka we might have the war dog tattoo inside of our mouths, our outsider status would never be taken away. N'Jadaka held onto the royal ring inherited from his father Prince N'Jobu, and that was his key to rightfully challenge for the throne in ritual combat. The stark contrast between their characters is the place in which they battle from, "Or more specifically, while T'Challa's nobility allows for the recreation of a noble lineage in the face of black histories of slavery, Killmonger's desire to right the wrongs of his past and his anger at having been abandoned persuasively recreates the divide between African Americans feel between themselves and Africa" (LaRue 49). Killmonger had some very flawed ideas, but who else was fighting for the liberation of Black peoples? African American masculinity operates from a place of being orphaned and seeking mother Africa as the restorer of our heritage, dignity and identity.

The themes of afrofuturism presented in Black Panther "unchains the mind" (Hanchey 360) to empower peoples across the diaspora. Wakanda is the fictional place where European colonization never happened. It is our fantasy to return to a place more technologically advanced than the rest of the world because it is the result of the creativity of undisturbed mind without the bondages of mental slavery from colonial power structures. GraveDigger Jones portrays exactly what is needed, "the Attorney General, the State Department, or even the President of the United States [don't] know about one goddamned thing that's going on up here in Harlem," and Jones frustratedly says, "We've been trying to teach white folks all our lives. School's over!" (20:45)

Wakanda is the collective unhindered black consciousness. Black masculinity is W'Kabi defending the nation's borders against outside threats. Black masculinity is not being a monolithic culture but a meshing of five distinct cultures for the greater good.

Black masculinity defined in contrast to whiteness is exotic yet dangerous. It originates from a place of being misunderstood and in search of home. Initially, Det. Ron Stallworth finds meaning in his work as his central focus to be a police officer. Stallworth is in search of more power than his black body otherwise affords him without the authority of a badge and power to take life with his service pistol. Eventually, he comes to realize that his significance and power is limited because of his lack of institutional power, and from this point on, his masculinity comes in tackling the world together with Patrice and sticking the finger to white supremacists even David Duke, the Grand Wizard of the KuKluxKlan. Dap presents a revolutionary sort of black masculinity found in the hearts and teachings from Malcolm, Nat Turner, Marcus Garvey, Frederick Douglas, Jesse Jackson, and Farrakhan. Dap finds home in the arms of Kyme because she is what centers and controls that seemingly untameable rage and desire for justice. Half-Pint experiences masculinity through his identity as a Gamma man, and his sexual conquest of Jane's body. Chris is the example of the neo-slave experience with black masculinity as he confronts both the sunken place and neoliberalism. T'Challa is the lineage of kingship we desire to return, and N'Jadaka is the revolution at the center of the African American black masculinity.

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April 30, 2021

### “White Supremacy is Terrorism”

On Jan. 6th, thousands of angry, disillusioned Americans stormed the US Capital after months of being fed unsubstantiated claims of the inefficacy of the democratic process summed up in the phrase, “Stop the Steal.” This served as a rallying cry for the silent majority who identified with President Trump’s rhetoric centered in “taking the country back” and “making America great again.” The protests and rallies were symptomatic of their fear of the browning of America due to increased immigration and resistance to change that could potentially dethrone white supremacy as the original sin of the nation. Political commentators and pundits on the right and left denounced the attack with a common narrative, “This is not America.” America is a nation founded on genocide, slavery and oppression. The indigenous peoples were massacred in pursuit of manifest destiny, the idea that the United States is destined-by God-to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across North America. Native peoples were forced from their lands onto designated reservations where a culmination of tribes with varying cultural identities were herded, and their children were taken to Native American boarding schools with the goal of “civilizing” or assimilating indigenous children to American culture all the while vilifying their heritage. Africans were bought and looted from the shores of West Africa to endure chattel slavery for generations to the benefit of the white plantocracy. More of their descendants are imprisoned in the prison industrial complex than were ever held in

involuntary servitude; this system of mass incarceration is upheld by the 13th amendment, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist in the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction” (Our Government). A brief look back at America’s problematic history tells a different tale. This is who we are, “In many ways, the day was unprecedented. It was certainly antithetical to what America ought to be. But it was an uprising perpetrated by Americans, on American soil, against the seat of American government, and fomented by the American president. It was, in fact, America.” The assault on the Capitol was an act of terrorism, and it was a prime example of the value gap. White supremacist culture is the gasoline igniting American terrorism on its own second class citizens by asserting the value gap and using the military to spearhead the invasion of Muslim countries under the guise of spreading freedom and seeking justice for the 9/11 attacks.

Eddie Glaude, Princeton Professor of Religion and African American studies, outlines the idea of the value gap, “It determined where you lived, which schools you attended, and what jobs were available to you. It reminded you daily of your status and station in life. And that’s white supremacy without all the bluster: a set of practices informed by the fundamental belief that white people are valued more than others” (Glaude 30) in his book, *Democracy in Black: How Race Still Enslaves the American Soul*. The response to the Capitol insurrection was intentionally light in response to social media forums and Qanon conspiracy theories inflaming MAGA supporters to “fight like hell” per the direction of President Trump. The average American knew something was amiss simply by following Trump’s tweets. The attack was not a surprise, but it highlighted how white Americans are not as seen as threats. Capitol police looked at the insurrectionists and were able to see the faces of people who could be their family

members. The mob was a group of professionals, businessmen, attorneys, police officers, former military, and members of right-wing paramilitary groups all converging to assert and proclaim their entitlement to not adhere to constitutional processes. As Sen. Mitt Romney (R-Utah) said to his colleagues when the Senate reconvened hours after the riot, the burden and duty of leadership is to tell the truth. The truth requires us to acknowledge that the current moment is not an isolated incident, but rather the latest chapter of a long history of anti-democratic, racist, and often violent right-wing activity in America. Only after recognizing this can, we try to prevent it from happening again. Romney, a long-time Republican senator, spoke out denouncing the sedition, but the majority of the Republican Party played the political game by not initially standing up and against President Trump's rhetoric. Trump pandered to the underlying racial resentment of his base and the Republican Party was going to take advantage of the direction the party was headed.

Civil rights activists have always had to be concerned for their safety and wellbeing while demonstrating for equal rights and protections under the law. "It was Freedom Summer in the Deep South. The year was 1964, when hundreds of young adults mobilized to help disenfranchised Black folks register to vote when they were denied that basic right. James Chaney, a native of Mississippi, was a 21-year old civil rights activist. On June 21, 1964, Chaney, Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, along with two White college students from New York, were kidnapped by the KKK, who shot them before burying their bodies in an earthen dam" (Clay 1). Their deaths would be used as talking points by politicians in order to lobby for the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The system of white supremacy was so entrenched that the murder of five activists, including two white students, was a method of intimidation to send a message to all those who dared to challenge the status quo. "Black folk

from the South who were active in the Civil Rights Movement during that era had a front-row seat to White domestic terrorism” (Clay 1). The terrorism of the Civil Rights Movement was reminiscent of the lynchings during the Reconstruction period. The torture and murder of black people was a community event where school was cancelled, and the town brought their lunch to watch the spectacle for a sense of medieval entertainment. The value gap has a long and bloody history in these United States of America.

Lynchings and other instances of the value gap spelled out here are manifestations of “white rage” as outlined in Dr. Carol Anderson’s work with the same title. Those acts of domestic terrorism are the examples of racism, America acknowledges, but it misses all of the covert manifestations of the value gap:

White rage is not about visible violence, but rather it works its way through the courts, the legislatures, and a range of government bureaucracies. It wreaks havoc subtly, almost imperceptibly. Too imperceptibly, certainly, for a nation consistently drawn to the spectacular-to what it can see. It’s not the Klan. White rage doesn’t have to wear sheets, burn crosses, or take to the streets. Working the halls of power, it can achieve its ends far more effectively, far more destructively. (Anderson 3)

The palpable anger of television personalities and radio pundits who see protests and activism work as anti-American are angry because it is black advancement not prioritizing their comfortability. White rage is triggered because, “It’s not the mere presence of black people that is the problem; rather, it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship. It is blackness that refuses to accept the subjugation, to give up” (Anderson 4). Black people pursuing liberation is an attack on whiteness and any perception of America as not being God’s Promised Land is irrefutably shut down.

The value gap is the core of who we are as a nation. The Black Lives Matter protests were met with a show of force from federal law enforcement, the US armed forces, and unmarked paramilitary groups who were free to round up civilians. “The crisis currently engulfing black America and the country’s indifference to the devastation it has wrought illustrate what I call the value gap. We talk about the achievement gap in education or the wealth gap between white Americans and other groups, but the value gap reflects something more basic: that no matter our stated principles or how much progress we think we’ve made, white people are valued more than others in this country, and that fact continues to shape the life chances of millions of Americans. The value gap is in our national DNA” (Glaude 31). The Capital insurrection, a very white crowd, was allowed to defame the halls of Congress, walk back to their hotels, and dozens of the thousands were flagged at the airport while trying to go home. Many of the insurrectionists will never be punished for their actions, yet those who stood in solidarity with Black people because of ill treatment at the hands of law enforcement were met with riot gear, tear gas, and rubber bullets. Radical, domestic terror acts are treated as a constitutional guarantee when committed by white supremacists, “On the one hand, there’s the belief that white supremacists who kill for ideology should get the same terrorism label as Islamic State group supporters. On the other, there’s concern about infringing on constitutional guarantees to protect free speech, no matter how abhorrent” (Tucker & Balsamo 1). With ideological murder being viewed the same as self-expression, there is no real tracking process or even a universally accepted criteria for domestic terrorism. Domestic terrorism needs to be equally defined and tracked the same as international terrorism. The issue is “terrorism charges are done purposely to send a much broader message, and so having that be the charged crime

puts that label on that and says, ‘This is someone who committed a terrorism act’ (Tucker & Balsamo 1). The narrative shift of “Americans” being labeled as terrorists doesn’t give credence to the falsehood of Muslims as anti-American jihadists seeking to tear down the West.

The events of 9/11 have been intertwined into the American story of fighting for freedom, and Muslims were deemed the enemy, “...we heard the increasingly familiar accusations that most Muslims are supporters of terrorism, if not terrorists themselves, and demands for Muslims to prove the opposite by apologizing, denouncing terrorism and terrorists, locating their moderates and fixing their communities and religion” (Winter 1). 9/11 was an event that changed the world because of America’s interconnectedness with the world economy and imperialist military with bases stationed around the globe ready to provide firepower to support American interests. American exceptionalism, birthed out of our moral victory over the Axis powers, is behind “the master narrative of the cultural trauma of 9/11 was quickly formed within a matter of days of the attacks” (McSweeney 208). Americans borrowed from ideas established in popular culture and film:

These narratives are tied to the longstanding belief that the USA is uniquely consecrated to the protection of liberty and democracy, yet this belief has produced two contradictory attitudes. As Henry Kissinger notes, ‘The first is that America serves its values best by perfecting democracy at home, thereby acting as a beacon for the rest of making; the second, that America’s values impose on it an obligation to crusade for them around the world’ (1994:18). Hellmut Lotz defines these attitudes as Isolationism and Leadership (McSweeney 208-209)

America sees itself as the moral force for good in the world to which other nations come for aid, guidance, and support. America tells stories of itself as the default and representative of the

world in films like *Battle: Los Angeles* and *Battleship* where alien forces seek to take over the world.

The juxtaposition of far-right terrorism being identified as the number one threat, but it hasn't trickled down to the general public. Dylann Roof murdered nine black parishioners of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in an outburst of extremist violence, "we heard many ask why is it not called terrorism when white people do it? This was reiterated, with 'Christian' replacing or added to 'white'" (Winter 1). Roof was arrested without incident by the arresting officers, and he wasn't concerned at trial because he believed his prison sentence was irrelevant because he would be freed after a coming race war. Stephen Paddock, a white 64-year old, used the 32nd floor of his casino hotel room to rain down a hail storm of bullets killing almost 60 people. "Although many news outlets declined to identify Paddock as a terrorist, his actions, much like the actions of terrorists during the Civil Rights Movement, shed light on the fact that not all terrorism in the United States is from foreign countries" (Clay 1). Paddock conforms to the norms of the typical white domestic terrorist. "This claim/question and attempts to identify 'white terrorism' has been the focus of memes and the #whiteterrorism hashtag on Twitter, and developed in posts from Tim Wise, and articles such as Big Think's 'Why does the media refuse to call white murderers terrorists?' and Salon's 'Why is it always the white guy' and 'Let's deport the white males?'. One Senator, Sherrod Brown (D-OH), also added his voice, saying about terrorists: 'Normally, they look more like me than they look like Middle Easterners... [t]hey are generally white males, who have shot up people in movie theaters and schools'" (Winter 1). There is a sense of rage in combination with an unreal sense of entitlement that fosters the logic of mass murder. The racialization of terrorism is the foundation of white domestic terrorism.



In a system founded in white supremacy, the extremes of domestic terrorism are difficult to identify:

In terms of analysis, while some of those who make the label argument also engage in an analysis of white supremacy, they often not only ignore structural and systemic white supremacy, but actually distract from it by associating it with such extreme manifestations. In terms of identification, the question is not what they are called, but why white people are not implicated in such acts, particularly as they are often predicated on a white supremacy that, despite claims by the far right that it is under threat or lost, maintains a hold in American institutions and socio-economic structures? It may be that the continuing existence of structural hegemonic white supremacy and lack of challenges to this, helps prevent identification with the extremes (Winter 2).

American culture is founded in the notion of rugged individualism because to be American is to be an individual. To be American preceded by a hyphen, i.e., Muslim American, is to be automatically seen as a member of the collective. The extremism or even a simple mistake by one member is then stereotyped onto the whole.

### *9/11: The Falling Man*

The Falling Man photograph captured a single moment of an extremely traumatic event and contextualizes the less popular narrative of the "jumpers" who perished because extremists hijacked planes to crash into the World Trade Center. These poor souls were put in a position where they had to choose between two horrendous deaths: jump from hundreds of feet in the air to a sudden, painful death or be burned/crushed in the rubble of the collapsing skyscraper. As the man plummeted to his death, there was a photographer who captured, "this movement--from a

photograph recording a fraction of a second to a conventional narrative of longer duration, and from still photograph to moving image--enables both films to seek different forms of redemption via what Thomas Stubblefield describes as 'the cathartic power of the fall' (McSweeney 67). The capturing of this moment allowed for worldwide discourse and largely the self-censorship by the media. "Also proscribed were explicit images of death and dismemberment, a prohibition that extended to any image of the consequences of falling to the ground from such a great height. As Stephen Prince observes, media 'gatekeeping' ensured that '[t]he carnage on the streets below the towers, with hundreds of burst and shattered bodies strewn across the pavement, has never been written about or substantively photographed" (McSweeney 68). The image ingrained into the consciousness of the country was repeated images of the planes crashing into the towers and their eventual collapse. The media came to a consensus to use the "more manageable figure" of the Falling Man instead of retraumatizing Americans with footage of hundreds of their fellow citizens plummeting to their death. The Falling Man eventually became a symbol akin to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in American mythology, "Montgomery argues that this movement from concrete, verifiable entities to large abstractions serves in practice only to mystify the underlying event by immediately embedding it in larger discourses of patriotism, the homeland, and the imagined community of the nation" (McSweeney 70). America, as a nation, giftwraps difficult truths into bite size patriotism pieces. There is a difficulty in accepting the ugly realities of life because it challenges American mythology.

The act of terrorism is nothing without witnesses to spread the messaging of the devastation and terror wrought upon those affected. Witnesses carry the trauma of experiencing terrorism in their psyche, and those witnesses do the work of terrorizing one another with the fear of what if. The act of, "[w]itnessing is a crucial force for understanding the meanings and

consequences of terrorism. Witnessing is embodied, situated and located and it is through witnesses that we discover that “Understanding the world is about living inside the stories” (Howie 9). Through the eyes of most Americans at the time of 9/11, there was a mutual understanding of the need to unite against a common enemy. It was difficult to contextualize a seemingly random attack on a nation that has done nothing but try to help spread a message of freedom and prosperity to the rest of the world. Americans had sold ourselves on a watered down, prosperity gospel of who we are as a nation. The Internet has changed the, “Witnessing 9/11 and other acts of contemporary terror are little more than a Google away. Moreover, this visual capturing and replaying - or re-animating - has made post 9/11 screen culture possible” (Howie 10). There is a certain level of retraumatization that happens even as teachers continue teaching students about 9/11 and replaying the videos of the towers falling, interviews of weeping, distraught family members, and the anxiety that sets in wondering if it will happen in another American city. Humans are the targets of terrorism, “What these forces - witnessing, the dominance of the visual sense and the ability to capture and record imagery - amount to are the coordinates of a victimized audience in the theater of terrorism. This is who we are; imperfect human actors with unreliable visual field perceptions” (Howie 10). In our haste to make sense of 9/11, we defaulted to revenge or as some would call it, justice.

The narrative surrounding 9/11 quickly shifted from the atrocities of thousands of dead Americans to a country galvanizing together after the attacks and preparing to wage war on all of those responsible. *In Memoriam - New York City, 9/11/01* begins, “In voiceover Giuliani reflects on how he considered the World Trade Center a symbol of a particular type of egalitarian and specifically American ‘freedom’, defined as the ability to succeed through hard work. Giuliani then counsels that 9/11 must be looked at in all its awfulness so that it might fuel the

resolve to defend this ‘freedom’ (McSweeney 69). As the mayor of New York City, Giuliani had a responsibility to unite his city and “defending freedom” is a patriotic phrasing that Americans harkened to as they grappled with the reality check to American exceptionalism. American mythology equates freedom with America. In his address to the nation, President George W. Bush delivered a poignant message, “A great people has been moved to defend a great nation. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve. America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining” (Bush 01:13). The president played on the trope of America as “the city on a hill” in reference to the nation’s colonial Puritan heritage. John Withrop used this phrase to describe the Massachusetts Bay colony, which he believed would become a shining example of Puritanism. The religious connotation plays into “America as a Christian nation,” although the phrase could be used to describe any place that should be copied. The Falling Man photograph captures the essence of Bush’s religiously charged narrative able to fit into the redemptive story because it “has the potential to be read as showing agency, bravery, mastery and (religious) transcendence. By this logic the photograph has the potential to redeem not just the cruel facts of the falling people but the ways in which the experience of 9/11 profoundly challenges US national identity” (McSweeney 75). In order to defend America, there were calls to war on both sides of the aisle to avenge the 3,000 lives lost on 9/11. Witnessing the acts of terror mobilized young men across the country, who had grown up hearing the stories of defending the homefront and fighting evil, decided to enlist into military service. One of those young men was Chris Kyle.

*American Sniper*

American Sniper follows the story of Chris Kyle as he accepts his calling as a sniper in the Navy Seals after transitioning from being a Texas cowboy. Kyle is the quintessential American hero. He seems to emerge out of nowhere “for such a time as this” in defense of the homestead. Kyle is reminiscent of Captain America:

In a kind of shorthand, we called that apocalyptic crusading mentality ‘the Captain America Complex’ because of the Captain’s recurring apocalyptic battles to save the world in the comic book pages. The canonical statement of the ‘Complex’ in foreign policy had surfaced at the time of the Spanish American War when Albert J. Beveridge (1898) spoke these words to his fellow US Senators: ‘Almighty God...has marked the American people as the chosen nation to finally lead in the regeneration of the world. This is the divine mission of America...We are the trustees of the world’s progress, guardians of the righteous peace (McSweeney 24)

Chris Kyle repeatedly reenlists at the peril of losing his family to fight apocalyptic battles against the Taliban. Kyle holds onto a lesson his father taught him early on after a schoolyard fight, “There are three types of people in this world: sheep, wolves, and sheepdog. I damn sure ain’t raising no wolves.” His father goes on to explain sheep as those who can’t protect themselves, wolves are violent bullies blessed with the gift of aggression, and sheepdogs have an overpowering need to protect the flock. In the analogy, Mr. Kyle whips off his belt and threatens to beat his sons if they ever bully or behave like wolves against other children. As a sniper, Kyle provides overwatch for the soldiers and Marines on the ground, and he is romanticized almost as their guardian angel who protects them from the unseen enemy. President Bush and other national leaders of the time echo this romanticizing of war.

Initially, the war on terrorism takes on the role of taming the frontier, and the Middle East is equated to the Wild West. Upon entering the city, a fellow serviceman tells Kyle, “Welcome to Fallujah. The New Wild West of the Middle East.” The military plays on a familiar narrative of the US military going over to strip land and resources from the native peoples because God has declared the land ripe for colonization. “There had been a cultural search for an inspiring figure to symbolise America’s aspirations to create a safe, ‘never again’ world. George W. Bush referred to ‘this crusade, this war on terrorism’ and promised, ‘We will rid the world of evil doers’ (quoted in Purdum 2001)” (McSweeney 24). The issue with the idea of “ridding the world of evil” is that evil persists and from the perspective of jihadists, America is a cancer the world needs to have removed. Even to Americans, there is a realization that the nation needs to be overhauled.

President Bush played on his Texas heritage in keeping up with the cowboy narrative, “Drawing on the mythic, the president evoked the cowboy Western when he styled himself as sheriff, declaring on 19 September 2001, ‘I want justice...There’s an old poster out West that said, “Wanted, dead or alive”.’ In this vein he said of the Taliban, ‘we’re going to smoke them out’ (quoted in Knowlton 2001). Surprisingly, in November 2001 US Special Forces did ride horses to capture Mazar-i-sharif in Afghanistan (Stanton 2009)” (McSweeney 24). The President giddily took a photo holding a Rambo poster and taking pride in the military action against the enemy. Chris Kyle follows the President’s lead as a sort of “sheriff” figure bringing in criminals dead or alive. There is a good vs. evil fight that plays out beginning with Kyle’s first kill of a small boy and his mom who charge a platoon of Marines with a Molotov. After the kill, Kyle remarks, “It’s just not how I imagined that first one would go down.” The mother and son humanize the Taliban. These aren’t religiously zealous, bearded men with automatic rifles

screaming death to infidels, but this is a mother and school age child who see the Marines as invaders on their land. Kyle hears of a rival sniper who plays out as his nemesis, “They’ve got this one sniper who’s been hitting heads from 500 yards out. They call him Mustafa. He’s in the Olympics.” Kyle leads a group of Navy SEALs after Mustafa also known as the Butcher. As Kyle is talking to his wife Taya, the Taliban launch a surprise ambush with rocket propelled grenades, machine gun and sniper fire. In the fight, Kyle loses his SAT phone and Taya is left helplessly screaming for her husband as she hears the ensuing battle. Mustafa kills multiple Marines and SEALs, but he is eventually taken down in a Western rifleman fashion saving the life of an unsuspecting platoon of Marines. Following in the footsteps of Chris Kyle, Billy Lynn becomes a Texas legend in his own right.

*Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk*

*Billy Lynn's* captured the essence of the frontier mythology enshrined in Texas culture. There were several references to the Alamo as the calling card of patriotism. It was seen as the Americanized version of the Spartans' last stand at the Battle of Thermopylae instead of Texans being outclassed by General De Santa and the Mexican army. Billy was the type of soldier to be idolized like Audie Murphy or Chris Kyle because "the best fighters come from Texas" (Fountain 111). The American education system teaches students to romanticize war as fighting for freedom, spreading democracy but not as securing places of interest to line the pockets of major corporations. In their victory tour around the country, Billy Lynn sees firsthand how empty American patriotism presents itself in false niceties, “Strangers make free with Billy’s young body, kneading his arms and shoulders, clutching his wrists, clapping a manly hand to his back. They gush. They swear allegiance and undying gratitude” (Fountain 113). Lynn has been propelled into stardom, and he’s able to see American life outside of his small Texas hometown.

Kathryn, Billy's sister, mentions to Billy that he shouldn't die a virgin and asks how much he's getting laid since arriving back home for his victory tour. In these warrior type film adaptations, there is an obsession with sex being seen as the pinnacle of manhood and without it, the hero is still a boy. Billy has even internalized that same idea, "He needs a woman. No, he needs a girlfriend, he needs someone to mash into body and soul and he's been waiting for it to happen these entire two weeks, the girlfriend, he's been traveling this great nation of ours so you would think that after all the miles and cities and positive press coverage, all the love and goodwill, all those smiling cheering crowds, he would have found somebody by now" (Fountain 26). There seemed to be an unconscious infatuation between Kathryn and Billy. What's interesting is the comparison of the failed love lives of Billy Lynn and Chris Kyle. Kyle's focus was on chasing his dreams of being a cowboy and then even after becoming a SEAL and marriage his wife complains, "It's not about them. It's about us. You have to make it back to us." Billy falls head over heels for a Dallas Cowboys cheerleader whose interest in him is more of an attraction to the uniform and sense of obligation to service the country. Both film adaptation and novel end with Billy never "achieving manhood", but he returns to continue fighting out of a sense of obligation and loyalty to his fellow soldiers.

Billy's father was partly comedic relief with his nonstop watching of FOX news but his situation was sad because he was reduced to grunting and rolling around in his electric chair. Billy's father and the guests at the Superbowl party are a reflection of American values, "Military institutions reflect--as they must--the societies from which they are sworn to serve and protect. Given that armies are primarily human institutions, the existence of this social imperative should not be surprising. 'They' are 'we,' or at least a part of us. In America, the ideal and tradition of the citizen soldier remains strong in our affections, though much less so within



the military today than in the past” (Snider 48). In the context of Billy Lynn’s experience with the executives, to be anything other than pro-military is to be unAmerican. War is America. The executives assume that because he is a soldier, Bravo squad want to talk about war, “Here at home the war is a problem to be solved with correct thinking and proper resource allocation, while the drama and passion arise from the terrorists’ goal of taking over the world. *Ire way of life. Ire values. Ire **Christian** values.* Billy can feel his head emptying out” (Fountain 116). The American narrative connects being American with frontier justice and completing the mission objective of “fighting for freedom” by any means necessary.

### *Taxi to the Dark Side*

*Taxi to the Dark Side* was graphic to say the least. It's not so much an issue with seeing the military commit such atrocities because the United States is an imperial, colonizing power, but the soldiers turned interrogators don't see the Afghan men as equals. Taxi attempts to take a moral stance by, "focusing on the consequences of 'the dark side' for its victims, inspiring pity for them and outrage towards those who instituted the torture policy" (Chaudhuri 23). The "pity" doesn't lead to any real substantial change because the Bush administration was seen as a "wartime" president, and those presidents, in particular, are historically given near unlimited power in the name of national security. In the Global War on Terror, the United States participated in kidnapping, torture, and murder of civilians in the hope of finding a lead to Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. "Under this programme, suspects have been clandestinely abducted and flown to CIA 'black sites' and other secret detention facilities around the world, without their fate or whereabouts being disclosed, and away from the scrutiny of international monitors" (Chaudhuri 25). There is no real accountability from Congress because the Senators and representatives don't want to be viewed as unpatriotic or anti-American. Dilawar (alongside

the other thousands of falsely accused) was almost an afterthought in the trial. His death was inconsequential. These men were stripped of their humanity. The documented evidence bordered on pornography; "It was violence as an image. It was violence without violence. It was the pornography of terrorism - terrorsex. Only a small percentage of 9/11's witnesses watched the violence as a "real" event. The vast majority witnessed the event as hyperreality on television" (Howie 182). The convicted soldiers all focused on their own suffering without fully comprehending their actions had the direct impact of a man losing his life. As a nation, our hyperfocus was on exacting revenge for the 3,000 civilians lost to extremist violence that we succumbed to the violence we proclaimed to stand against.

The American empire was rooted in white supremacy typified by the value gap since its inception. From the country's long history of committing domestic terrorism against racialized groups to using select acts of jihadist terrorism as an excuse to declare war on Islam. As Senator Romney insists on telling the truth about America, in order to "Situat[e] domestic terrorism in any sort of historical framework threatens to unravel myths of American unity and exceptionalism, and it is not especially surprising that, compared to other movie genres such as gangster and war movies, there has been markedly myopic trend in Hollywood regarding far-right and White supremacist terrorism. This has reinforced a wider pattern of institutional forgetting that has left far-right terrorism largely stranded in the past and divorced from contemporary political debate" (Rich 165). The ability and privilege to divorce right-wing terrorism for what it is lessens the opportunity to unite the nation and confront the lie of American exceptionalism.

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30 June 2020

Research Proposal

### **Abstract**

The research presented here studies culturally responsive pedagogy designed to utilize the existing discriminatory practices inflicted upon Black bodies as a tool to develop the educational experience of P-20 students. The realities of everyone as racialized beings in a nation systematically designed to position the majority as superior to “the Othered.” I have read the literature surrounding Critical Race English Education, and it can be utilized as a tool to create equity among all learners and combat racist systems in our educational curriculums. Literacy scholars suggest flexibility as students wrestle with the misperceptions, stereotypes, and racial violence that are inflicted upon Black lives.

### **Introduction**

Critical Race English Education (CREE) is a pedagogical framework useful in confronting anti-Black racism and white supremacy in the training of pre-service English teachers and their ELA classrooms. Lamar Johnson, language and literacy scholar at Michigan State University, frames his research around the deaths of unarmed black men: Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown. Johnson wrestles in coming to terms with his own Black skin and its historical connection of the dehumanization that leads to state-sanctioned racial violence. Black

and brown students in ELA classrooms around the country are force fed “eurocentric ideologies which are acts of violence that constantly remind Black children and youth that their language, literacies, culture, race, ethnicity and humanity don’t matter. Therefore, I take a close look at the ways in which educators can counteract the racial violence that erupts in ELA classrooms and in language and literacy studies through humanizing curricula and pedagogical practices that reject anti-black racism” (Johnson, *Where Do We Go From Here?* 104). How can educators change anti-black perception and give students their humanity? Educators have a responsibility to their students while their minds are still malleable and before social circles become defined. Dignifying black literacies is activism and freedom.

The English language arts curriculum reinforces racial norms by perpetuating white norms, language, and values. June Jordan delivers a keynote address to the NCTE, “...English education acts as a gatekeeper...closes down opportunities...narrows rather than opens possibilities of social meaning and social action” (Johnson, *Where Do We Go From Here?* 107). Curriculum is established by those in power, and it is designed to cater to canonical literature. A truly revolutionary step is diversifying and therefore humanizing the experiences of minorities. The literary canon in ELA classrooms are monolithic in the perspectives and authors that are the required texts. There is a plethora of Black writers whose texts speak from the past directly to the oppressive experiences of the marginalized to this day. Literacies are not limited to novels. Many of the most impactful words from Black leaders were spoken and not written down during their lifetimes. Amidst the George Floyd protests, activists are speaking out with fiery, impromptu speeches.

#### Review of Related Literature

In order to better understand the metaphorical killings of minorities in the educational systems, their students' experiences and pedagogical frameworks need to be unpacked. BlackCrit is a response to critical race theory "to better understand "the Black experience" and how anti-black racism is located in laws, policies, and the everyday lives of Black people" (Johnson, *Where Do We Go From Here?* 106). Anti-black violence occurs in the education of Black students because of their traditional beliefs of dominant language ideology. Labov concluded that "the major causes of reading failure [among African American learners] are political and cultural conflicts in the classroom, and dialect differences are important because they are symbols of this conflict" (Wheeler 366). The discrepancy with dialect comes with the expectation that people of color become fluent in Standard English, thus highlighting the bidialectical approach required of codeswitching from the student's native African American English at home then to Standard English at school. The deficit model at which teachers can expect from these students is summed up with, "Tamisha, an African-American child in Hampton Roads, Virginia, knew firsthand the terrible consequences of dialect prejudice. Because Tamisha spoke AAVE, Melinda, her teacher, assumed that Tamisha was stupid and incapable...Melinda assessed Tamisha as non-verbal, capable only of coloring books" (Wheeler 369). Unconsciously, Standard English is taught as the language of academia and the intelligent. If and when Black students use their native tongue, it is often met with ridicule and disdain.

Literacy is a political act. Through his great-grandfather's stories about literacy, Johnson realizes, "it was the first time I began to problematize this notion of what it means to be literate and what it means to be illiterate. In that moment, the dominant/traditional versions of literacy were put at odds against my family's and community's versions of literacy" (Johnson, *Racial Hauntings* 489). Big Daddy was a part of a legacy of individuals systematically denied education



and the opportunity of financial freedom in the pseudo-slave labor force. The family and community literacy are the oral traditions passed down through the generation. Those stories from Big Daddy are so important, “My first racialized critical reading of the world comes from the raced and gendered stories from my great-granddad. Through his utilization of storytelling, I listened to my great granddad’s stories and the narratives about him, and they have provided me with racial, familial, and gendered knowledge” (Johnson, *Racial Hauntings* 489). These stories are the markers of a heritage not shared in history and literacies not deemed as relevant to the average American.

### Argument

English education has a particular significance in the fight for equality with its unique position to study and interpret literary texts. Literature is deeply personal and the storehouse of lived experiences. Literature explores what it means to be human, but “In a time of racial chaos, when Black people are losing their lives at higher rates than any other racial and ethnic group as a result of state-sanctioned violence, white supremacy, and anti-black racism, what is English education to do? Where do we go from here? (Johnson, *Where Do We Go From Here?* 107). Dr. King posed the question, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?* in his least popular text before his assassination. It is from this particular work that frames Johnson’s line of thinking as he considers the state of education in the English classroom as the wealth inequality of monolithic texts. English educators have the ability to delve into the vastness of humanistic literary expression, which is not solely restricted to novels. Black forms of literature are particularly expressive from Lorraine Hansburry’s play *A Raisin in the Sun*, to Dr. King’s “A Letter from Birmingham Jail,” to Malcolm’s greatest oration, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” to Marvin Gaye’s *What’s Going On* or Kendrick Lamar’s *To Pimp a Butterfly*.

Everyone will not go to college and receive an education from scholars, but teachers are “public intellectuals” who have the ability and responsibility to teach their students to critically read the world. News outlets and the traditional classroom lags behind social media, an instantaneous meeting place for the politically conscious. Literacy promoting social movements, “I specifically draw upon critical orientations to literacy that refer to “the process of reading texts in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships and contexts” (Boutte, 2015, p. 79). An essential element of critical literacy in Freire’s (1970) notion that literacy is not only about reading the word but also about reading the world--societal events are texts that must be read, interrogated, and interrupted” (Johnson, *Where Do We Go From Here?* 108). There were questions from Johnson’s former high school students demanding justice in the face of racial violence and looking towards their teacher for guidance. Twitter allows black and brown people to connect with other marginalized communities from around the world. The tweets detailing the similarities between police brutality in America and Palestine, “#DearFerguson. The Tear Gas used against you was probably tested on us first by Israel. No worries. Stay strong. Love. #Palestine. Where I come from, what some call “rioting” we call an uprising. #Ferguson #Gaza #Palestine” (Johnson, *Where Do We Go From Here?* 115). Integrating and reimagining social media in the classroom is key to connecting generation Z in a form of literacy that has quite literally shaped their brains.

Black textualities can be used to reimagine the ELA classroom. #Woke is a political term originating from the African American communities centering around perceived awareness of issues concerning racial and social justice. This enlightenment would shift teachers from gatekeepers to allies and change agents. The critically conscious classroom is explored, “I thought about what it would mean to have a #WOKE classroom. What it would mean to

explicitly and intentionally do the work of cultivating critically conscious students?” (Cherry-McDaniel 42). Social media could be greatly incorporated into the classroom with Twitter hashtags: #BlackLivesMatter, #BlackGirlMagic, and #BlackIntheIvory. The classroom is a space constructed by the government to assimilate students to the dominant culture. A pertinent example is in the argument against the traditional teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird* was delivered after a point where the reader is hooked following the buildup to CREE in the classroom. Atticus Finch is traditionally taught to be the protagonist of the novel as Tom Robinson’s white savior. The focus on Finch as the hero and the character development of his daughter, Scout, helps the reader to shift focus from the trial of Tom Robinson for the alleged rape of a white woman. Throughout the novel, Tom is shown as completely dependent on Atticus to save his life, and he is at the mercy of an-all white jury, who is sure to condemn an innocent man. The high school classroom would not unpack the implicit bias and overt racism that lead to Tom’s demise. Instead of the accused being painted as a victim, he could truly be the hero of the novel for courageously walking to a certain doom. The lesson on *Mockingbird* leads into the critique of his leaving the issue of mass incarceration as largely unexplored. The disproportionate mass incarceration and drug sentencing disparities of Blacks profit billions in corrections, but the classroom is the perfect space for social change, “We often give lip service to democracy in a classroom, but there must truly be free exchange of ideas and deliberate sharing of power that will engage students as actors and stakeholders in their classrooms and beyond” (Cherry-McDaniel 43). #Woke is a reminder to not get comfortable with a false sense of security. The goal in a critically conscious democracy is to engage students in their citizenship rights allowing them the knowledge to navigate political arenas to affect change.

## Conclusion

The time for change is now, and teacher-activists are the heart of our nation becoming a democracy for all. CREE is the framework at the center of the pedagogical and ideological shift in how students are educated. The nature of the subject matter lends the ELA classroom to be more flexible and conducive to difficult conversations. Black textualities give new voice to ignored counternarratives because texts lend themselves to be deconstructed through literary analysis. It is easier to teach a text and discuss character development in allowing it to do some of the heavy lifting because the interaction between text and the individual reader is based on all of their experiences brought to the reading. From that place, students think, write, and discuss from their various understandings, and that particular exchange of ideas is the fundamental shift in our society. CREE forces white educators to “see” the brilliance and intelligence of their minority students because of their cultural differences and unconscious biases, which in turn creates understanding in what defines disrespect and office referrals. The visibility allows those teachers to finally come to an understanding of violence against non-white students in the classroom and see the young black men as #TrayvonMartin or #MichaelBrown.

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<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7709/jnegroeducation.85.4.0489>

I entered this program with the hopes of using it as a tool to expand my content and pedagogical knowledge, and I thought it would be interesting to teach in the gifted classes. Experiences similar to my own are reported in the research where

Black males are viewed as unofficial administrators tasked with disciplining the “problem” students. The reality is the deficit model of viewing black males as not capable as gifted students extends to their teaching abilities, “It is also safe to suggest that if everyone suddenly viewed Black male teachers as academicians, instead of individuals who mentor and discipline Black boys.” Black intellectuals are not expected. “Gifted education [is] grounded in elitism, elitist thinking, tracking, and eugenic ideologies.” Teachers of color are so important for the unique perspectives they bring to the classroom and are good #WOKE classes.

Cherry-McDaniel. “#WOKE: Employing Black Textualities to Create Critically Conscious Classrooms.” *The English Journal*, vol. 106, no. 4, March 2017 pp. 41-46.

Teachers are deemed public intellectuals. The goal is using black textualities to reimagine the English classroom. Classrooms are spaces for social change, and #BlackTwitter is like our newspaper. The #Woke classroom is a space to transition the students into citizenship.

Chiaravalli, Arthur. “AP English Literature and the Pedagogy of Whiteness.” Medium, 26 July 2018, <https://medium.com/@iamchiaravalli/ap-english-literature-and-the-pedagogy-of-whiteness-aab1b42a172d>. Accessed 16 July 2020.

AP history courses move the dates up “limiting itself to covering only history after 1450 CE.” This essentially marginalizes history before colonialism. Nate Bowling was quoted, “If your AP & IB classes don’t look like the rest of your

school, you're perpetuating systemic racism and classism." AP Literature classes are centered on "white stories and students."

Goings, Ramon and Qi Shi. "Black Male Degree Attainment: Do Expectations and Aspirations in High School Make a Difference?" *Spectrum: A Journal on Black Men*, vol. 6, no. 2, Spring 2018, pp. 1-20,  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/spectrum.6.2.01>

The study analyzes what affects black males in attaining their degrees. There was the phenomenon of the self-fulfilling prophecy whereby others' expectations of a target person affect the target person's performance. The research shows teachers who believe in their students' success are more likely to succeed.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "A Letter from Birmingham Jail." 16 Apr. 1963.

Dr. King's letter was targeted to his fellow ministers and white moderates who called out his present activities as "unwise and untimely." When would the time ever be right? Those activists were accused of stirring up civil unrest within the minority communities, and this really transfers to the field of education.

Johnson, Lamar et al. "Loving Blackness to Death": (Re)Imagining ELA Classrooms in a Time of Racial Chaos." *The English Journal*, vol. 106, no. 4, 2017, pp. 60-66.

"It is a staunchly held myth in American society, in particular public education, that the horrific acts of violence (lynching, rape, etc.) are relegated to the dark annals of history. The myth continues with violence against unarmed Black youth in the classroom. The language and rhetoric screams, "White is right." The

symbolic violence in ELA classrooms: the bullet of rejection, the bullet of silencing, and the bullet of disrespect.

Johnson, Lamar. "The Racial Hauntings of One Black Male Professor and the Disturbance of the Self(ves): Self-Actualization and Racial Storytelling as Pedagogical Practices." *Journal of Literary Research*, vol. 49, no. 4, 2017, pp. 476-502. Sage Publications, doi:10.1177/1086296X17733779.

Johnson makes this great connection with Black rage and the devaluing of our vulnerability. Black rage is a response to oppression not an avenue for revenge. He explains uses racial storytelling as a pedagogical tool. "Teaching for liberation and human freedom is soul work--that is, it requires a deep excavation of the self(ves)." White educators are not excluded from racial storytelling, and it could be used to tackle their own racism.

Johnson, Lamar and Nathaniel Bryan. "Using our voices, losing our bodies: Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, and the spirit murders of Black male professors in the academy." *Race Ethnicity and Education*, doi:1080/13613324.2016.1248831

Education values eurocentric schools of thought. This article poses a great question, "In short, educators need to stop debating the perennial question of 'What is wrong with Black males and their tensions with the educational system?' And, instead, ask, 'What is wrong with the educational system and its tension with Black males?'" Counter-storytelling as a tool in the ELA classroom, and it challenges the dominant ideology.

Johnson, Lamar. "Where Do We Go from Here? Toward a Critical Race English Education." *Research in the Teaching of English*, vol. 53, no. 2, Nov. 2018, pp. 102-124.

This article really spoke to my experience, and it highlighted the association of hoodie with thug (the new n\*\*\*\*). CREE has a goal intertwined with #BlackLivesMatter. How can we change the negative perceptions and give students their humanity? The ELA curriculum reinforces racial norms by perpetuating white norms, language, and values.

Wheeler, Rebecca and Julia Thomas. "And "Still" the Children Suffer: The Dilemma of Standard English, Social Justice, and Social Access." *JAC*, vol. 33, no. ½, 2013, pp. 363-396. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43854557>. Accessed 24 May 2020.

The article begins with bashing code-switching as inherently racist. "Educators traditionally operate through a lens of dominant language ideology, the belief that Standard English is the only True and Real language, and that other varieties are degraded and broken."